

June 10, 2021

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Making a Fuss? Over This? Can't Be.* New York in the summer. Ahhh! For those of us who prefer or enjoy warm weather, well, it's a *mechaya* (more Yiddish in our Yiddish-friendly Congregation - see [my email of 4.8.21](#)). We are approaching the official first day of summer, June 20 (June 20 rather than June 21 happens infrequently - how infrequently, and what's the algorithm?). We are blessed to be experiencing a mild summer for Covid-19 disease spread as well. The numbers continue to improve in our geographic area. And with that improvement, we as a Congregation continue our measured and safe return to pre-Covid normalcy.

On Shabbat, for those who have been vaccinated, our outdoor service will continue to offer a choice of being masked or maskless. Our rituals are being put back in place, which adds length to the service but also beauty and dignity. Rabbi Soloveichik spoke after services last Shabbat and gave his afternoon class. Outdoor Shabbat services will soon be back to full pre-Covid-19 splendor (minus the Tiffany windows and the choir, plus a lawn, evergreens, and open air).

Indoors, too, we are moving *ahead* by moving *back* to where we were. Rituals during the Torah service are being reinstated, as are the other parts of the service that were abbreviated earlier. Our Choir, who typically enjoy a summer hiatus, will not be back yet, but we hope to have them rejoin for the High Holidays (which begin right after Labor Day this year). Our Working Group prefers for us to continue to observe social distancing, but over the summer we don't have enough of a crowd to press the limits of our sanctuary. The exception for crowds will occur on Tisha B'Ab, 5-1/2 weeks away. We will have more to say about how we will keep that special day safe yet meaningful for our congregants and visitors. The goal is that by then we will be observing as many of the protocols for indoor services as we have for outdoor services as the disease numbers and the good judgment of our Working Group advises.

Appropriately, our return to normalcy indoors is occurring slowly. It is that that prompts the subtitle above. The rate of speed at which we are returning to pre-Covid-19 indoor Shabbat services is a fair topic of conversation among our congregants. The Working Group benefits from a diversity of well-intentioned expressions of views as well. Our congregant and Working Group mainstay Dr. Lewis Lipsey expresses the point poetically in thinking about the tradeoffs surrounding continued mask wearing in our indoor service:

Use of the masks inconveniences some and limits their ability to enjoy the breadth of the religious experience. Use of the masks permits others to perceive safety while enjoying the service along with the companionship of others.

It seems obvious from these lovely words that how quickly we return to normalcy in our tiny area of the globe, when so many of us (especially our children, but also others) remain unvaccinated and international travel is back robustly, simply cannot be something that leads to raised temperatures or raised voices. Don't we all agree that what matters infinitely more is that we approach the issues in the spirit of good will and of community. If all goes blessedly well, we appear to be nearing the end of the isolation and dislocation that has challenged our community -- at least here, at least for the summer, assuming no new variant strains. Won't we all be saddened, and embarrassed, if we tarnish our communal spirit now?

*Garbage Out.* Another Covid-19 Working Group mainstay, Dr. Michael Gelman, jocularly describing a challenge he is facing having nothing to do with Covid-19 or the synagogue, said, in the context of a quintessential NYC apartment search, that, far from having his pick *of* the litter, he felt that his hapless lot was instead picking *through* the litter. Clever, no? He is not just neatly changing the prepositions; he is using "litter" differently in the comparison -- in the second instance as refuse, rejects, garbage. The timing of Michael's funny quip couldn't be more fortuitous - "fortuitous" here being used in the sense of fortunate and spot-on, not random or happening by chance. (Double and evolving meanings of a word or phrase to

denote something quite different from what was initially meant is the same principle that answers my question about how "mare's nest" came to mean complexity or confusion, which by the way no one has yet to unravel (see [my email of 5.20.21](#).) His timing is fortuitous because of an interesting set of rules in this week's Daf Yomi as well as a profound thought about life stemming from it.

In Tractate *Yoma*, page 60a, which we learned this week, the Talmud develops an earlier discussion surrounding the fact that the first order of business in the Temple service was that the Kohanim would remove the ashes from the offerings that had been burnt the day and night before. Those ashes, called *Terumat Hadeshen*, needed to be carried off every day, and the Talmud addresses with characteristic detail the who, how, when, and where. It does not take much to see the metaphors available to deepen our appreciation of this formalized equivalent of "taking out the garbage". And, indeed, the Torah's reference to the *Terumat Hadeshen* (in Sefer Vayikrah) inspired a well-told story (confirmed by our son Yosef) about a former Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Rav Gifter, undoubtedly one of the true Torah giants of that generation. The great Rav was counselling young newlyweds, who came to discuss the wife's wish that the husband, who was learning in yeshiva all day, devote a little time to taking out the garbage, which the husband felt he was too busy in his Torah studies to do. Rav Gifter was unwilling to say that the husband was duty bound to take out the garbage. The story continues as you would expect: The next morning Rav Gifter showed up at the couple's house. The young man was overjoyed, believing the Rav had come for a social visit. Rav Gifter politely declined the offer of hospitality, saying instead that *he* had come to take out the trash.

As good as that story is - and it's great - there is an equally beautiful meaning that Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch ascribes to the *Terumat Hadeshen* ritual. I borrow from his insights here. Every morning, the service in our Temple, surely once our national shrine, displayed a deep, abiding connection to the past as well as a forward-looking investment in the future. The *Terumat Hadeshen* ritual showed that the sacrifices made yesterday form the basis of our lives today and tomorrow.

The ashes were the essential leftovers of the prior day's pursuits. And we begin our new day paying a respectful homage to that past. But the homage is not bondage. We remove the ashes of yesterday to make way for the constructive activity of a new day.

Isn't this a fitting metaphor for our current situation? Our community and those around us are resurfacing after more than a year's worth of sacrifices both large and small. We pay solemn homage to that past. We will never forget the losses, both within our community and without. But like each new day in the Temple, let us respectfully say goodbye to the past year's isolation and deprivation and gloriously set our new course, together, as a community.

All this from garbage - who'da thunk?! (Anyone remember the band Garbage and its 1999 theme song to the Bond film, [The World is Not Enough](#), Eh.)

*Half-Full Report.* Three fun items:

*First*, pencil in June 23 for our first movie night on Paved Paradise. By an overwhelming margin, *The Princess Bride* is the winner. And Andrew and Jacqueline Klaber are hard at work procuring the popcorn and otherwise pulling it all together. Rabbi Soloveichik's rear-guard action to show *The Ten Commandments* instead was squashed. We hope to be screening one or two other movies this summer, but watch for details about our first movie night together, which will be great fun.

*Second*, our Lounging on the Lawn program started this week. Come and enjoy the outdoor space to sit, read, eat, chat. The Wi-Fi works well. And if you are lucky, you will get a glimpse of Rabbi Rohde doing his yoga/tai chi/whatever he's doing. Check for time and details.

*Third*, we officially open the Picturing Paved Paradise contest. You will recall that, when initially imagining our outdoor space, we saw a photograph looking suspiciously like the Taj Mahal (see [my email of 11.12.20](#)). Of course it was actually our very own Paved Paradise. More recently, you saw how Lincoln Center

sought to flatter by imitating us ([email of 5.13.21](#), as reported [in the New York Times](#)). Here is my third entry.



You might THINK it's a pic of the New York Philharmonic's first-ever time performing at Bryant Park last night. Well think again. It's actually what our Paved Paradise can look like when filled with people enjoying an evening of music. Now it's your turn. Send in your photos, natural or photo shopped, of favorite outdoor spaces that might imagine they were us.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Chodesh tob. Shabbat shalom.

*Louis M. Solomon*

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